

Charles and the Burgundian State.

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Burgundian provinces a great centralised State, which the death of Charles the Bold had temporarily dislocated, bade fair to emerge. Provincial liberties and rights had suffered in the process, but the States-General had at least the power of granting taxes and wringing redress of grievances as a condition of its liberality. The Flemish cities had lost their old vitality, but those of Brabant and Holland were rising into prosperity. Amsterdam and Antwerp were inheriting the prosperity of Bruges and Ghent. A powerful united State, of which the States-General held the purse-strings, and on whose government they had consequently an indirect influence at least, seemed to be striking vigorously out on a great career among the modern nations. With Charles as pilot, there appeared to be no fear of shipwreck. With Philip in his father's place, the outlook suddenly darkened. By his bigotry and tyranny the Spanish Philip steered straight on the rocks, and the Burgundian State was for ever buried under the billows of rebellion. In its place rose the Dutch Republic, the glorious creation of the spirit of liberty which Philip's despotism evoked, to the undoing of the Spanish-Burgundian rule over this heroic Dutch folk. This spirit of liberty was the offspring of a long tradition of manful struggle in the assertion or vindication of political rights. It was mightily quickened by the new force of religious conviction which the Reformation brought to the Netherlands, as to the other countries of Northern Europe.

In a region so replete with manful struggle in defence of civic and political rights we should naturally expect to find frequent traces of reform in the Church, and even of revolt against the hierarchy. Nor is our expectation disappointed. The Church in these Burgundian lands was indeed rich and powerful, for here, as elsewhere, the clergy had taken care to help themselves very liberally to the things of this world through the testaments of the dying faithful. They throve magnificently on mediaeval ignorance and superstition. The bishops were lords of vast estates, and some of them, like their episcopal highnesses of Liege and Utrecht, were powerful sovereigns. Besides the broad acres belonging to the Church, the clergy drew large revenues from tithes and dues. But their wealth and privileges exposed them to the envy and hatred